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# NEWS
## FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

*Know your Museum better*

No. 5 TORONTO July, 1941

## WHAT THE WELL-DRESSED MAN WORE

One of the most interesting exhibitions in the costume room of the Royal Ontario Museum is also one of the most sombre. It is a man's outfit of clothes worn about 1810. It belonged to Mr. Thomas Coutts, the founder of the great Coutts bank which is still flourishing in England. Mr. Coutts was quite conservative in his clothes and his suit is of plain black broadcloth with the coat cut short in front and extending at the back in long tails--very similar to the modern man's evening coat. Mr. Coutts's trousers are knee breeches although younger men at this time were starting to wear long trousers. A shirt frill shows at the neck opening and his collar is of stiffly starched linen and just up on to the cheeks at either side in a most uncomfortable way. His under flannels, night-shirt and night-cap, wig and stockings are included in the exhibit.

The Museum is most fortunate in possessing this outfit. The fact that it has been preserved is due to Mr. Coutts's own far-sightedness for he had a clause put in his will stating that his clothes were to be kept for 100 years and then distributed to different museums throughout the world.

During the 19th century a great many small boys were dressed in skirts quite like those that their sisters wore.In the costume room of the Royal Ontario Museum, two suits that were worn by a little boy, about 1880, can be seen. One is of striped green silk trimmed with plaid velvet ribbon; it consists of sleeveless dress with tight bodice and a full skirt which would extend to about mid-calf, and a short, loose jacket with long sleeves. The other is a dress of closely woven fawn cotton, elaborately trimmed with white braiding, with short sleeves, a fitted bodice and a full skirt. With it is shown the underwear worn with these clothes, a combination garment of white cotton which had the straight pant legs edged with a frill which would show below the hem of the skirt.

The hat worn with these clothes would horrify the modern child for it is a sailor shape made of gray-green satin and it is trimmed with pleating, braid, fringe, rosettes and has lace ear flaps and pink ribbons to tie under the chin!

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SPONGES WERE HARD a few million years ago, with strange glass-like skeletons that have been left in the rocks of the period. Many fine specimens of these "stony sponges" are on exhibit in the Royal Ontario Museum.

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VISITING HOURS AT MUSEUM

Week days except Monday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sundays 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Closed all day Monday.

## *Pearl Buttons and Freshwater Clams*

"Are our freshwater clams or mussels of any use to man?" we asked Mr. Oughton who is in charge of the mollusc collection.

"In Ontario there are two distinct clam groups, finger-nail clams and pearly mussels. The finger-nail clams of several kinds, which are an inch or less in length, provide food for fish. The large pearly freshwater mussels,ranging between one inch and eight inches,have three possible claims to human interest, namely, pearls, buttons and food. I have not yet seen any good pearls obtained from local clams, but occasionally, "slugs" or inferior misshapen pearls are found. As for buttons, while there are forty-five different species of mussels recorded from the province, these are mostly too thin or of an undesirable color for the button industry. For some years one man on the Grand river collected mussel shells for shipment to the button factories of the United States. Although mussels are the chief food of the muskrat, they are too tough and tasteless to appeal to most humans.There is another minor use which I had almost forgotten. Some of the settlers along the Ottawa river used to burn the shells of the river mussels in order to produce a fine sort of powder. This they used instead of talcum powder."

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## *POISON IVY - BEWARE!*

Are you allergic to poison ivy? If so, you will be interested in a small exhibit in the Canadian gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum. Do you know, for instance, that the irritating effects are due to the action of a non-volatile oleo-resin which is found in the epidermal hairs,whose breaking off and transportation by air currents may set up a reaction in extremely sensitive persons without any actual contact with the plant? Can you distinguish the poison ivy plant from the somewhat similar Virginia creeper? Many interesting facts, a description of the plant and practical suggestions for relief from poison ivy are set forth on a label at the side of the case.

The exhibit proper is composed of a cross-section of soil, tufted with grass from which rise the poison ivy plants, life-size and true wax replicas of the plant in Nature. Poison ivy can teach even the wary a bitter lesson, for sometimes it is low and erect; sometimes trailing or creeping, but the three leaflets, no two of which are alike provide a valuable means of identification. Experience may be a great teacher but all poison ivy sufferers will agree that to positively identify the plant is a lesson better taught by a Museum exhibit than by a spiteful specimen in the rain-drenched woods.